

The Self Portrait: How Are We Doing In South Carolina in 2007?



Executive Summary Survey One



J I M S E L F
CENTER ON THE FUTURE



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South Carolina's population and physical surroundings are facing unprecedented change. Population growth rates, the increase in developed land, test score rankings, and poverty indices are under scrutiny. In the midst of this change, it is important to assess how the state's citizens perceive they are faring.

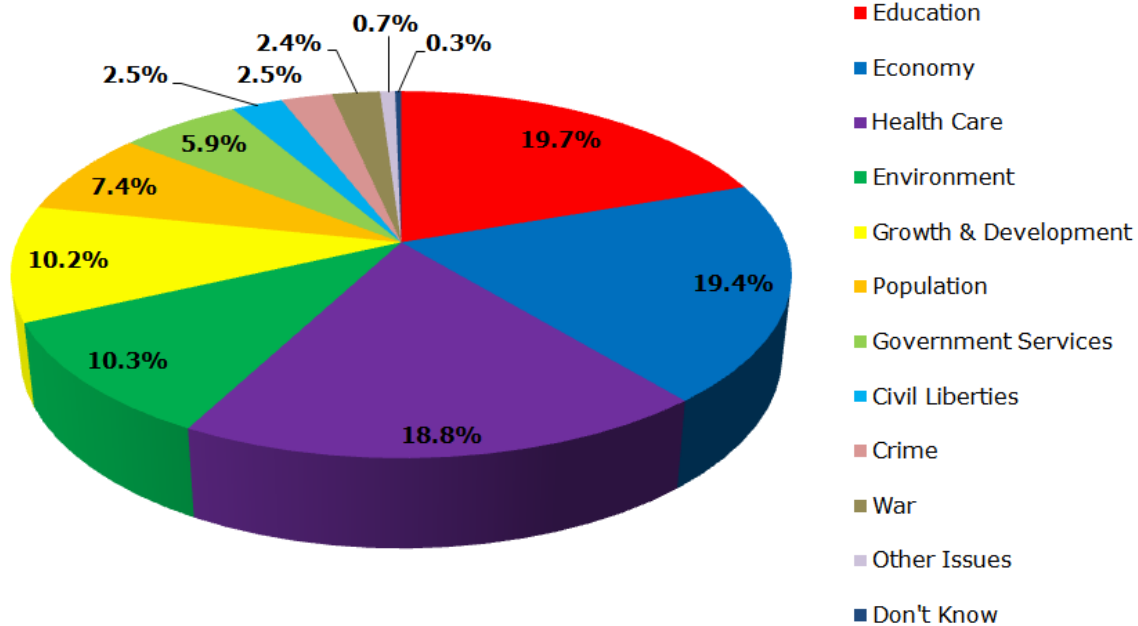
Understanding concerns, where needs are going unmet, where there is optimism, and where resources should be targeted is the goal of *The Self Portrait: How Are We Doing In South Carolina?* This effort is designed to understand South Carolinian's perceptions of the state's current and future outlook and to understand how and if attitudes are changing over time. Targeted to South Carolinians over 18 years old, this baseline study is the first in a series of studies that will be conducted twice a year.

In this first study, respondents express concern about an array of issues but education, the economy, and health care surface as the major concerns. Many of the respondents are satisfied with South Carolina's quality of life and growth rate. In the same positive vein, many of the responses indicate optimism about the general direction of the state and the next generation's competitiveness in the global economy.

Interesting findings emerge, however, when the data is cross-tabulated with demographic variables. Gender, race, age, education level, income, region, and whether they live in urban, suburban, or rural areas provide insight into survey participants' unique perspectives. While this information offers an interesting look at community sentiments, it will be more telling to compare responses over time.

The Self Portrait: How Are We Doing in South Carolina? is an effort of Clemson University's Jim Self Center on the Future in the Strom Thurmond Institute in collaboration with the University of South Carolina's Survey Research Lab in the Institute for Public Service and Policy Research. This summary and the full report are available at www.strom.clemson.edu.

*WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING
THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA?*



MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES

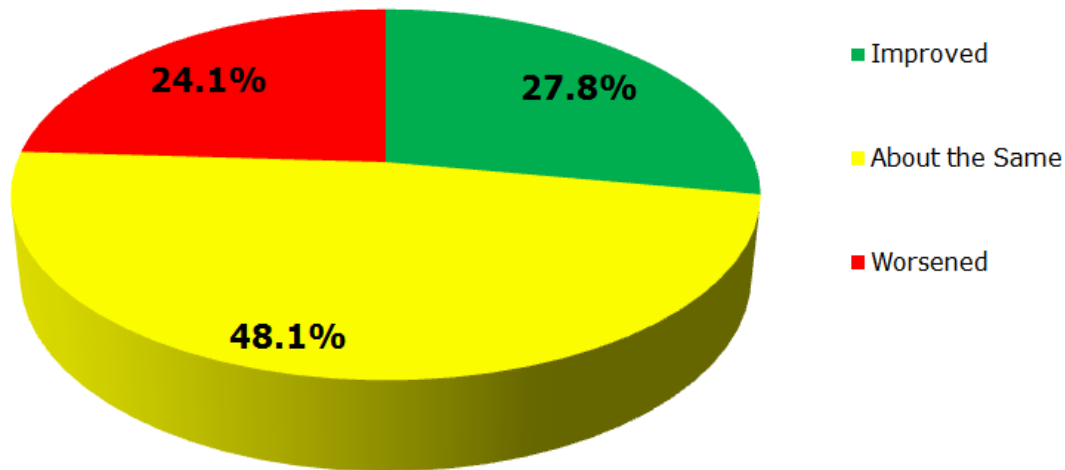
The most often cited responses (57.9% of responses) were education (19.7%), the economy (19.4%), or health care (18.8%).

- Most of the education issue respondents note education in general as the most important issue (72.2%). Issues surrounding K-12 were specifically mentioned by 18.1% of respondents, followed by public education mentioned by 8.3% of respondents.
- For the 19.4% of respondents concerned about the economy, employment (42.0%) is the most frequent concern followed by taxes (31.3%) and general concerns about the economy (26.7%).
- Of the 18.8% of respondents who noted health care as the primary issue, the majority responded with general health care concerns (52%). Senior health issues, HIV AIDS and sexually transmitted disease, health care costs and insurance coverage, and immunizations also were noted.
- Of respondents noting the environment as the most important issue (10.3%), approximately 41.4% specify some type of pollution, primarily water or air. Other issues included environmental control and garbage/litter.
- For the 10.2% citing growth and development as a primary concerns, 43.5% specifically mentioned transportation issues. Issues related to growth are of particular concern in the lowcountry where development pressures exist and transportation infrastructure is strained.
- Population issues are noted by approximately 7.4% of the respondents with specific concerns equally divided between general population growth and immigration.

ISSUES CROSS-TABBED WITH DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

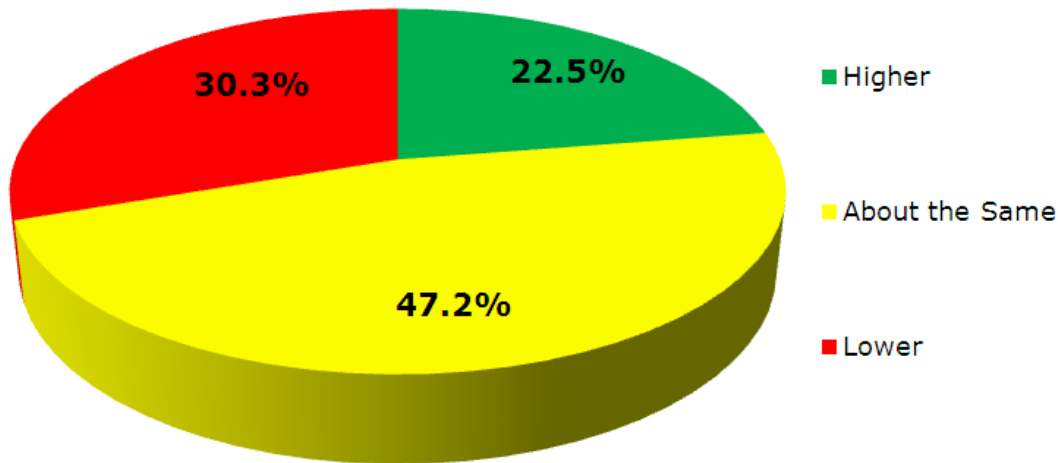
- By gender, males responded that the economy (25.4%) is the most important issue facing the state over the next ten years, followed by education (18.0%). Females responded that health care (25.4%) is the most important issue followed by education (20.8%).
- By race, the economy is the primary issue to be addressed for 27.7% of blacks, followed by health care (23.4%). For whites, education (22.0%) followed by the economy (17.4%) surfaced as the primary issues. For other races, health care is a notable concern for 35.5% of the respondents followed by education at 16.1%.
- By age, the economy which includes wages and jobs is the most noted concern for the 18-29 age category at 33.9%. Education surfaces as the most pressing need for 25.8% of 30-44 age group who are most likely to have school age children but also for the 65 and older population who may have school aged grandchildren. In the 45-64 group, health care is the primary issue for 20.1% of the sandwich generation who in addition to their own health may have responsibility for the health care concerns of their children and their parents.
- By income level, the <\$25,000 category was most concerned about health care (27.5%). In the \$25,000-\$49,000 and \$50,000-\$74,999 ranges, the economy which includes jobs and wages was the primary concern with 21.4% and 29.1%, respectively. For the ≥\$75,000 category, education ranked as the top concern (21.6%).
- By educational attainment, the results were similar to income level results with health care the predominant issue for the people with less than a high school education (18.9%) and for people with some college experience (25.3%). For high school graduates, the economy ranked as the major issue for 20.0% of the respondents. For college graduates, 25.9% ranked education as the most important issue group.
- By type of area, urban respondents were most concerned about health care (20.0%). In the suburban areas, education (21.1%) was the primary issue and in the rural areas, the economy (21.8%) ranked at the top of the list.
- By region of the state, upstate participants noted that the economy (24.6%) ranked as the most important issue. Education (25.5%) was the primary issue for the midlands, and health care (20.9%) was noted most often in the lowcountry.

*HAS SOUTH CAROLINA'S QUALITY OF LIFE
IMPROVED, WORSENE, OR STAYED THE SAME?*



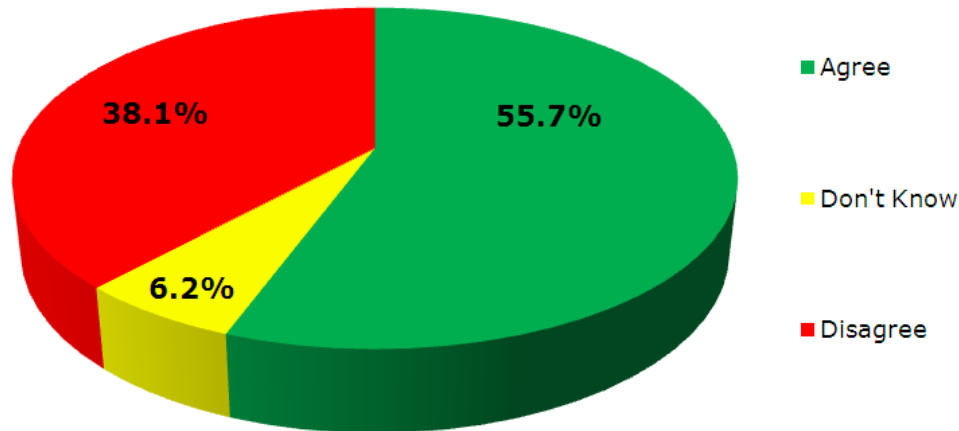
- Almost half (48.1%) of the respondents indicate that the quality of life in South Carolina is about the same as it was five years ago. Of the remaining respondents, 27.8% note that the quality of life has improved compared with 24.1% who say it has deteriorated.
- Jobs are the leading cause for whether the state's quality of life has improved or worsened. 'More jobs' are mentioned by the 15.0% of respondents who indicate that quality of life has improved. Jobs also are noted as the reason quality of life has worsened for 24.1% of respondents.
- Race makes a difference in whether respondents feel their quality of life has improved or worsened. Roughly twice as many whites (31.4%) and respondents who identified themselves as another race (32.5%) feel that quality of life has improved compared to blacks (16.0%).
- Level of education has an important influence on quality of life. Participants without a high school diploma respond most often that South Carolina's quality of life has worsened (34.1%) compared to respondents with a high school degree (25.9%), some college (24.3%), and with a college degree (17.4%).
- Similarly, incomes are a factor in quality of life. Of the participants in the \$75,000 and over income level, 39.2% responded that quality of life had improved, higher than the less than \$25,000 (24.2%), the \$25,000-\$49,000 (28.8%), and the \$50,000-\$74,999 (23.7%) income levels. At a rate of 36.6%, lower income participants responded that the quality of life has worsened to a much greater extent than participants over \$75,000 (13.5%), between \$25,000 and \$49,999 (21.5%), and between \$50,000 and \$74,999 (24.6%).
- Analyzed by region, the upstate did not fare as well as the midlands and the lowcountry. While the 31.2% of the midlands and 30.3% of the lowcountry participants responded that their quality of life had improved, only 22.8% of the upstate saw improvement.

DO YOU PREFER A HIGHER RATE OF GROWTH, A LOWER RATE OF GROWTH, OR ABOUT THE SAME LEVEL OF GROWTH?



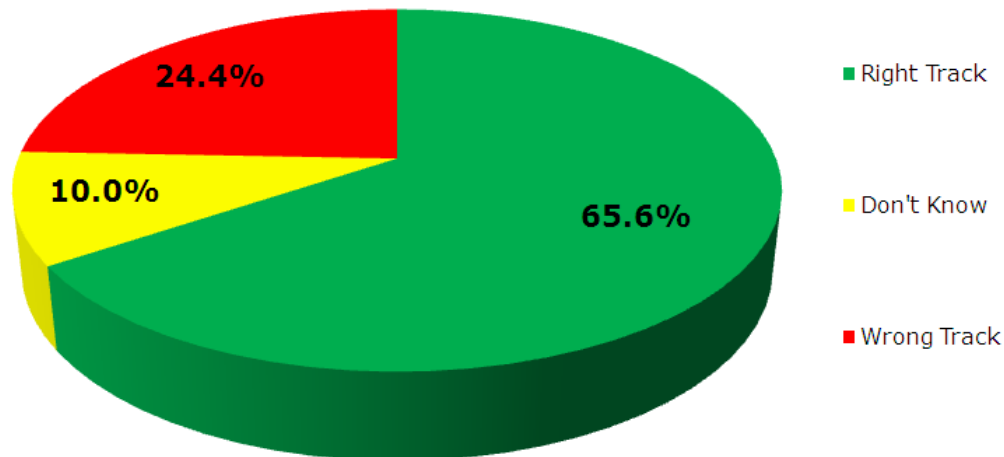
- Almost half of the respondents (47.2%) indicate a preference for about the same level of growth currently experienced. Of the remaining respondents, 30.3% prefer a lower rate of growth and 22.5% want more growth.
- Respondents over 45 years old prefer a lower growth rate with 33.9% for those 45-64 and 29.5% for those 65 and older compared to 20.0% for the age 18-29 participants, and 25.6% for participants between the ages of 30-44.
- Higher income groups indicated a stronger preference for lower growth rates.
- Urban respondents indicated a slightly higher preference for growth at 26.9% compared to 20.2% among suburban and 22.2% among rural respondents.
- Regional differences exist concerning rates of growth. Perhaps because of high rates of growth along the coast, lowcountry participants prefer a lower growth rate (43.3%) compared to upstate (26.5%) and midlands (25.3%) respondents.

*WILL THE NEXT GENERATION OF SOUTH CAROLINIANS BE ABLE TO
COMPETE IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY?*



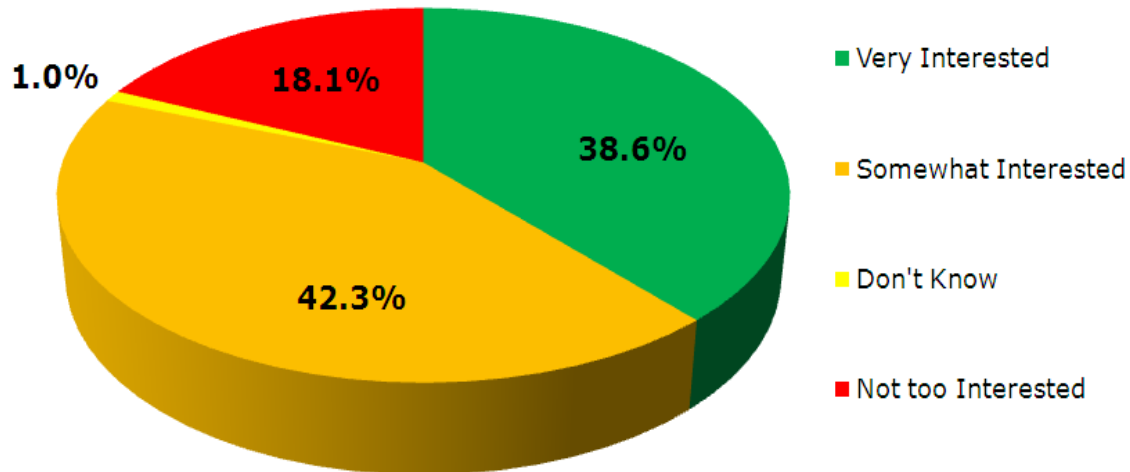
- The majority of respondents (55.7%) are optimistic about the next generation's ability to compete in the global economy.
- Of the optimistic respondents, 45.1% say this competitiveness is due to better education. Of the non-optimistic respondents, 59.6% say it is due to lack of or poor education.
- Younger respondents were the most optimistic. In the 18 to 29, age group, 69.4% of those surveyed felt that the next generation will be competitive followed by 59.8% in the 30-44 age group. Among older groups, the percentages drop to 53.5% for 45-64 year olds and to 51.8% for those over 65.
- Similarly, optimism drops with level of education. Those respondents with a high school education (61.2%) and less than a high school education (59.3%) were optimistic that the next generation would be able to compete globally. The figures decline for those with some college and a college degree at 52.6% and 53.7%, respectively.
- Although all income ranges agree that the next generation will be competitive in the global economy, this level of optimism tends to decrease as income levels increase. Optimistic responses range from a high of 63.8% for those earning less than \$25,000 per year dropping to 54.1% for those earning more than \$75,000. Likewise, participants earning between \$50,000-\$74,999 and over \$75,000 had a higher rate of disagreement with 44.6% and 43.3%, respectively, compared to participants earning less than \$25,000. In this \leq \$25,000 group, 29.4% felt that the next generation will not be competitive in the global economy.
- By region, 61.0% of upstate respondents agreed that the next generation will be competitive in the global economy, followed by 54.6% in the midlands and 49.0% in the lowcountry.

IS SOUTH CAROLINA HEADED IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION?



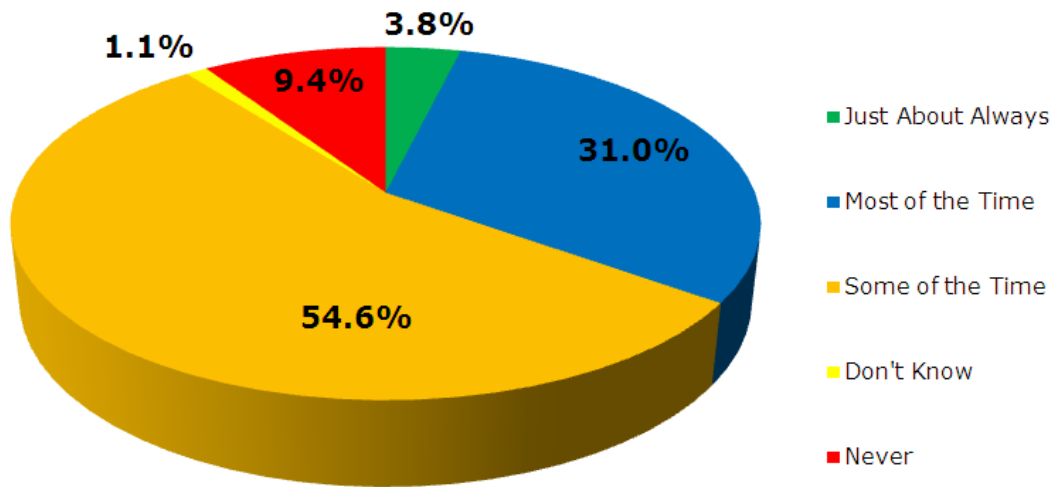
- A clear majority (65.6%) of respondents indicated that South Carolina is generally moving in the right direction. Slightly less than 1 out of 4 (24.4%) state that South Carolina is on the wrong track.
- Some difference occurs by race with 70.3% of whites, 55.6% of blacks, and 47.2% of other races indicating that the state is moving in the right direction.
- Younger participants feel that the state is moving in the right direction at higher rates than older participants. In the 18-29 age category, 77.6% said the state is on the right track compared to the 30-44 age category (72.4%), the 45-64 category (61.0%), and the 65 and older category (63.3%).
- Comparing responses by level of education, people without a high school degree and college graduates responded less favorably with 55.8% and 61.8%, respectively, about the state's direction than high school graduates (68.0%) and people who attended some college but who did not graduate (72.3%).
- As income levels increase, the percentage of people who feel that the state is on the right track increases. Individuals earning over \$75,000 felt that things were on the right track 72.6% of the time compared to 60.6% of those earning less than \$25,000 per year.
- The upstate had the highest percentage responding that the state is headed in the right direction at 67.9%, followed by the midlands (65.4%), and the lowcountry (62.8%).

HOW INTERESTED ARE YOU IN SOUTH CAROLINA POLITICAL ISSUES?



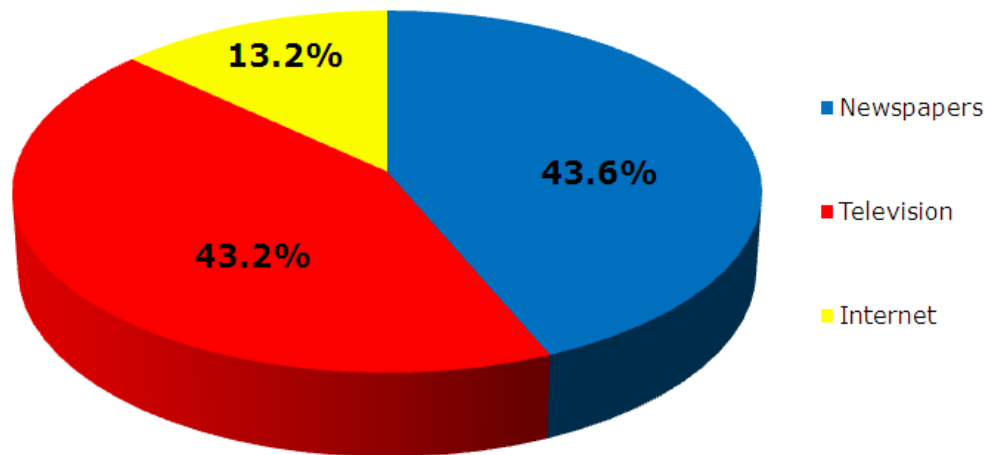
- Among respondents, 80.9% indicate that they are either very interested (38.6%) or somewhat interested (42.3%) in state politics. A lower number of respondents (18.1%) indicate that they are not too interested in state politics.
- At a rate of 42.2%, blacks responded that they are very interested in state politics more often than whites (37.6%) and other races (31.4%).
- Respondents 65 and over are very interested in state politics at a rate of 45.9% compared to the 18-29 age group (20.0%), the 30-44 age group (39.1%), and the 45-64 age group (38.1%). The youngest age group (18-29) responds that they are not too interested in state politics at a rate of 16.9% to 20.5% higher than the other age groups.
- With a range of 28.3% to 53.7%, the higher the education level, the more interested the respondents are in state politics.
- Likewise, the higher the income level, the more interested respondents are in state politics although the range (34.0 to 43.3%) is not as wide as the education range.
- Participants in urban and suburban areas are more interested in state politics than participants residing in rural areas.
- Perhaps because of proximity to the state capital, the midlands with 42.7% had the highest share of respondents indicating that they are very interested in state politics compared to the lowcountry at 39.8% and the upstate at 34.6%.

HOW MUCH OF THE TIME CAN YOU TRUST THE STATE GOVERNMENT?



- About a third of respondents (34.8%) trust state government either just about always or most of the time. Only 9.4% of respondents indicate that they never trust state government.
- A racial divide appears as 38.9% of whites trust state government all or most of the time compared to 25.1% among blacks, and 24.2% among other races.
- Differences were not as large among other groupings. The highest levels of trust were shown by those over 65, college graduates, and people earning more than \$75,000 per year.
- While the variance in responses is minimal between urban, suburban, and rural areas, the urban respondents have slightly more trust, and rural respondents have less trust in state government.

*HOW DO YOU GET MOST OF YOUR INFORMATION
ABOUT SOUTH CAROLINA?*



- The primary means by which respondents get their information about the state is split evenly between newspapers (43.6%) and television (43.2%). To a lesser extent, the internet is the source of information about the state by 13.2% of respondents.
- When asked whether they are more inclined to watch local or national news programs, 56.8% indicate a tendency to view locally based programs compared with 35.8% who view national news programs and 7.4% who view both local and national programs.

OBSERVATIONS

It is notable that there is a general sense of satisfaction with the status quo and optimism toward the future. This response is somewhat unexpected, however, given the state's low rankings on many national quality of life indices. Comparing this information over time and to media events around the time of the survey, will shed additional light on how we are doing and how external factors affect the citizen's sense of wellbeing. In the interim, we want to mention a few of the points that struck the authors as unexpected, compelling or worth review in subsequent surveys.

Respondents of *The Self Portrait: How Are We Doing In South Carolina?* indicate that the state will face not one but three equally important issues in the coming decade. Education, the economy and healthcare garnered nearly identical ratings from survey takers as being more important than the other issues. In fact, these issues are interrelated. Educational achievement indicates the potential for better paying jobs and more health care options. Economic well-being relates to general prosperity which touches education and health care but also the other issues mentioned - the environment, development, population growth, government services, crime and to some extent even civil liberties. From a policy level, the trick is prioritizing and addressing with success the issues that have the potential to improve overall quality of life.

About half of the survey participants felt that their quality of life is about the same as it was five years ago. Jobs are the reason for many respondents' sense of an improved quality of life but jobs are also the reason given by other respondents who feel their quality of life has declined. As might be expected, survey respondents with the lowest income and with the least amount of education most often felt that their quality of life had worsened, while respondents with the highest income and the highest educational attainment most often indicated that their quality of life had improved. Men more often than women felt that their quality of life had improved paralleling national surveys that suggest women's work and home responsibilities are affecting their sense of well being. Finally, and most significantly, black respondents most often indicated that their quality of life had worsened while whites and other races, predominantly Hispanics, responded that quality of life had improved. It may be that Hispanics moved from a low base so that even minor improvements in the basics affecting quality of life may be seen as improvement. It is possible that blacks may still be better off than the 'other' category, but in comparison to their situation over five years ago, they may feel that they are slipping during times of economic downturn. This variation in quality of life sentiments certainly warrants further review.

Many of the participants are confident in the next generation's ability to compete. Interestingly, the people who are least equipped to be competitive in the global economy are the most optimistic about this scenario. The 18-29 year old group and the participants with the lowest levels of educational attainment were the most optimistic about the next generation's competitiveness. Respondents 65 and older and those with the highest level of educational attainment were the least optimistic.

A majority of survey respondents (65.6%) feel that South Carolina is moving in the right direction. One wonders if a high percentage of citizens feel that the state is on the right track, will policymakers feel the need to put energy and resources towards improving the state's position. Still, this optimism is tempered by other respondents who are uncomfortable with the future and uncertain about the forces that will help to shape that future. Respondents in the lower income categories and respondents living in rural areas most often felt that the state was moving in the wrong direction. More often than the other racial groups, black respondents thought that the state was headed in the wrong direction which is consistent with the quality of life response.

This mixture of positive and negative responses offers South Carolina leaders the opportunity to listen, analyze, and respond to South Carolina's people. On one hand, optimism and satisfaction with the status quo may be good if systems are in place to maintain and enhance the state's assets. Yet, in a rapidly changing global environment, the state must look to opportunities and threats. *The Self Portrait: How Are We Doing In South Carolina* will continue to monitor the pulse of the state to assess where we have been and where we might be headed in the future.

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